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SUBJECT: NEW CZECH PARLIAMENT: FRESHMEN DOMINATE MAIN
PARTIES

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¶1. (U) SUMMARY. One half of the next Czech parliament, chosen in the June 2-3 general election, will be new members. The Foreign Affairs and Defense Committees lost more than half of their members, including some very experienced politicians. The parliament will have more representation by the two main parties, the Civic Democrats (ODS) and the Social Democrats (CSSD), increasing the probability of a grand coalition. The Greens, though the smallest parliamentary party, could still play a key role if a minority government is formed. Committee and leadership assignments are still being discussed, with each of the two main parties claiming a right to the Speaker's job. END SUMMARY

¶2. (SBU) Exactly 100 of the 200 members of the next Czech parliament will be new to their positions. Although most have some political experience at the municipal or regional level, they have not participated at the more partisan national level. More than two-thirds of the CSSD faction, 53 out of 74, will be freshmen. Of the 81 incoming ODS parliamentarians, 41 are new. The Communists, on the other hand, have 26 incumbents who were re-elected. Similarly, all 13 of the Christian Democrats were in the previous parliament. This is a reflection of the proportional system and the fact that each party puts its rookies in the middle or bottom of its electoral list. Since ODS and CSSD did better than expected, many of their freshmen made it to parliament. By the same token, since KSCM and KDU did worse than they had hoped, none of theirs did.

¶3. (SBU) A look at the committees on Foreign Affairs and Defense and Security give some idea of the scale of the turnover. Of the 19 members in the Defense and Security Committee, only 8 were re-elected. Three of the committee's deputy chairmen are gone. In the Foreign Affairs Committee, the Chairman, two of the Deputy Chairs, and 10 of the 19 members will not be back. Those leaving Foreign Affairs include some very experienced politicians, such as Chairman Vladimir Lastuvka, former Foreign Minister Jan Kavan, and former Defense Minister Vilem Holan. The Defense and Security Committee will lose CSSD stalwarts Petr Ibl, Radim Turek, and Milos Titz, among others. Among likely members of the next Foreign Affairs Committee are Ondrej Liska, a 29 year-old advisor to the Green Party in Brussels, and Jan Hamacek, the 28 year-old CSSD advisor on international affairs. Hamacek told poloff June 13 that he thought he would be assigned to the Foreign Affairs Committee because few parliamentarians seek the assignment. He explained that it requires foreign language skills and offers almost no chances to direct the disbursement of funds. He said he had the backing of Prime Minister Paroubek for this assignment. His second choice was a spot on the Committee for EU Affairs. Hamacek also told us

that the new MPs are paid as of June 3, can move into their offices on June 16, and should be sworn in on June 27, the first sitting of the new parliament.

14. (SBU) The next parliament will have a higher proportion of members from the two main parties, ODS and CSSD. The parliament elected in 2002 had slightly more than half (127 members or 54%) of its members from CSSD and ODS. The new parliament will have slightly more than two thirds (155 members or 67%) from CSSD and ODS, giving a potential grand coalition 35 more seats than the 120 needed to make constitutional changes, such as proposed changes to the election law. The dominance of the two main parties also gives a certain mathematical inevitability to some form of cooperation between ODS and CSSD. As Jan Hamacek of CSSD explained to poloff June 13, &Both sides are being a bit stubborn right now. But at the end of the day they have to talk to each other. Without cooperation, there is not much they can do.8 Hamacek said that there have been a couple of phone calls between Topolanek and Paroubek, the two party chiefs, but no formal approach to discuss cooperation has yet been made.

5.(U) The Greens, although the smallest party in parliament with only six seats, could play the role of kingmaker in coalition talks, and later on as the conscience of the legislature, since they are not anchored on either side of the political spectrum. The new Green MPs are younger than the average parliamentary age of 48 and have had influential experiences in Europe. Most speak English and at least one other European language. Chairman Martin Bursik was described reftel (Prague 427) The other five parliamentarians are Katerina Jacques, Ondrej Liska, Premysl Rabas, Olga Zubova and Vera Jakubkova. Jacques, 35, has been the Director of the government,s Office for Human Rights and Equal Opportunity. After graduating from college, Jacques studied in Berlin, where she met her French husband, Christian

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Jacques. The couple later lived in Strasbourg before she returned to Prague. Liska, 29, has been working in Brussels as an advisor on Regional Development and EU Structural Funds for the Green Party in the European Parliament. Liska has published a book on the role of Czech underground churches during the communist era. He was the Director of an NGO that promoted Czech-Austrian Dialogue, and worked for a foundation that put on annual seminars on global issues and human rights. Rabas, 42 is a zoo director, a former president of the nation's union of zoos, and an expert in endangered species. Jakubkova, 41, is the co-founder of an NGO and the Director of a center that provides environmental education to children. Zubova, 46, is the owner of an art gallery, a promoter of the arts, and an activist for the preservation of natural and cultural sites. The Green Party members will add a dash of pro-environment, pro-Europe flavor to the new parliament and could provide a voice against the abuse of power, if they are not marginalized altogether.

6.(U) The Greens are the only party to have achieved gender parity. Three of their six parliamentarians are female. The Communists Party comes in second at 30%. The two main parties come in at 12% for the Social Democrats (CSSD) and 11% for the Civic Democrats (ODS). Overall, there will be 31 women in the next parliament (15%), which is down slightly from the 34 in the previous parliament. This is consistent with the prevailing belief that politics at the national level is a dirty, underhanded, unethical undertaking that is inappropriate for women. It is also another sign of the disconnect between parliament and the public.

17. (U) The vote broke down along clear geographic lines, with CSSD coming first in the eastern Moravian half of the country and ODS winning in the western Bohemian regions, with the exception of the Usti region, which has 15% unemployment and has been a traditional stronghold for left of center parties. In the Usti district, PM Paroubek only narrowly defeated

Usti mayor Petr Gandalovic (ODS). Gandalovic's strong showing has boosted his position in the party and could help him become the next Foreign Minister.) If ODS forms the next government with the Christian Democrats and the Greens, the coalition will have 63 parliamentarians from Bohemia and only 37 from Moravia. The two parties on the left, the Social Democrats and the Communists, in contrast have 56 seats from Bohemia and 44 from Moravia. In general, Moravia has higher levels of unemployment, lower levels of education and more Catholics. Bohemia on the other hand, has lower unemployment and more residents in the mold of self-reliant Protestants. A right-of-center government will play to the western half of the country and promote entrepreneurship, fees for patients and students. A left-of-center government would be expected to address the social concerns of Moravians. A grand coalition would have difficulty satisfying either side and would be more fragile as a result.

8.(U) One of the main questions to be resolved before the anticipated first session of parliament is the Speaker's job. The job is powerful enough within parliament itself. But it has additional appeal for the two main parties, since the Speaker chooses the person to form a government if the first two attempts fail. Topolanek said June 10 that he thought ODS should get the Speaker's post and that Miroslava Nemcova, party Deputy Chair and also Deputy Speaker in the outgoing parliament, would be good for the job. ODS fears that if CSSD gets the post, the party will exploit the Speaker's powers during coalition negotiations. Jan Kasal, Deputy Chair of the Christian Democrats, said June 10 that his party could support a CSSD Speaker if CSSD could guarantee it would not abuse the power during talks on the new government. Zdenek Skromach, CSSD Deputy Chair, said his party was sticking to its position that it deserves to have the Speaker's job. The parties are not in agreement on the number of Deputy Speaker slots either, with some favoring five and some six. Originally there were six positions, but when Deputy Speaker Hana Marvanova (Freedom Union) left politics in September 2003, her position was left vacant. Topolanek has said that KSCM should not get a Deputy Speaker post, though it has one now. Martin Bursik would like one slot for the Greens. CSSD would like to have the Speaker and one Deputy, as would ODS.

19. (SBU) Retired Chief Justice and co-author of the Czech Constitution Vojtech Cepl told poloff June 12 that he borrowed from the German constitution when he gave the Speaker the power to choose the person for the third attempt at a coalition government. He explained that their research showed that by this stage some parliamentarians are ready to break party ranks and support a coalition led by their opponents. He said they even enshrined in law the right of

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parliamentarians to defy their parties. Cepl said the June 10 petition for which CSSD demanded that all 74 new MPs pledge not to support an ODS-led minority government was unlawful and undemocratic.

110. (SBU) COMMENT: If ODS succeeds in forming a minority government with KDU-CSL and the Green Party, half of the coalition's 100 parliamentarians will be new to the national legislature. If a grand coalition is formed, 95 of the 155 parliamentarians in the partnership will be new to parliamentary politics. This will present great opportunities for Embassy training programs. It will also mean the new members will need some time to learn the job. This will give added influence to the much smaller circle of already influential veterans, particularly in the less sought after committees on foreign affairs and defense. It is still too soon to tell what, if any, significant changes this large group of newcomers will cause, or whether they will simply add to the uncertainty of the early stages of the post-election period.

DODMAN